BRACEBITS

VOL. 2 MARCH 1987 NO. 3

EDITORIAL
by Hal Mason

Welcome to another edition of BRACEBITS. Perhaps, the first order of business is to ask you to check out the newsletter for a map which will enable you to get to our new meeting sight.

We are now exchanging newsletters with several Atari Users' Groups. So, I thought that perhaps they as well as the members of B.R.A.C.E. would like to find out how we put BRACEBITS together. As far as hardware is concerned, we are currently using an Atari 130XE, a 1050 Disk Drive, a P:R:CONNECTION, and a Panasonic 1080i Printer. Oh, yes, for a monitor I am still using a color TV.

As for Software, we are using Atariwriter Plus and PRINT SHOP by BRODERBUND (through the courtesy of Pat Danridge). We use the Atariwriter Plus to format in double columns and are using Near Letter Quality Condensed Print. We have been using the PRINT SHOP for the Masthead and to generate most of the graphics for the past issues, with the exception of our issue which was devoted to printers, when several of the pictures were made by the Atari 1020 Color Plotter. Since, we are using a combination of Atariwriter Plus for the text and PRINT SHOP for the pictures, we have to do some physical cut and pasting. We would like to move on to a system where all of the work is done electronically, but have yet to discover the software which will allow us to do this. I know that many Atari Users' Groups use TYPESETTER by XLENT for their newsletters. But, when you read my comparison of PRINT SHOP and TYPESETTER in this issue of BRACEBITS, you will find that I find TYPESETTER to be an extremely hard to use program. Also, it seems to be incompatible with my Panasonic Printer (if there is anybody out there who would be so kind as to enlighten me as how to use TYPESETTER with my printer, PLEASE DO SO! Or, perhaps you know of some other software which we can use to produce our newsletter with out having to Cut and Paste. Any help would be greatly appreciated).

BRACEBITS is put together by a staff of three, who you will find listed along with the officers. Of course, the hardest part is choosing from all of the articles which our membership submits to us each month. Sometimes we can narrow down the articles to a manageable number by having a theme for each issue of BRACEBITS. But, sometimes the number of article available for publication is still overwhelming, so we have to resort to other measures to decide fairly who shall be included and who shall suffer the pain of being passed over. We use two methods in order to achieve this cut impartially. The first method is to arrange the hardcopy in stacks and let my cats have a go at them. We then publish the articles that my cats leave intact (thus my cats are given the burden of being the editors who cut any particular article). The other method is a bit more advanced and does make use of Our Good Ole Atari. First we assign a Random Number to each article by a special program designed just for this purpose. Then, we again go through the process of generating a list of Random Numbers and we then print the articles in that order until we run out of room. OK, you guessed it, the last part of this has all been a fabrication. WELL I CAN DREAM CAN'T I? It sure would be nice to have too much material to choose from vs. the current state of affairs of having too little to choose from and having to generate it all ourselves.

SPECIAL THANKS TO JOE TACKETT FOR SUBMITTING HIS COMMENTS ON A VARIETY OF PRINTERS.

DISCLAIMER

BRACEBITS is published monthly by B.R.A.C.E. (Bluegrass Region Atari Computer Enthusiasts) of Lexington Kentucky. All contents, unless otherwise noted, are public domain and available for duplication. This newsletter is created by and for dues paying members of B.R.A.C.E. It is also available on an exchange basis with any other Atari users group. Neither B.R.A.C.E. nor BRACE BITS is affiliated with the Atari Corp.. Atari and the FUJI symbol are registered trademarks of Atari Corp. Any reference to any trademark should be so noted and is acknowledged. The articles in this newsletter are the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect that of the officers or the group.

Any dues paying member of B.R.A.C.E. may submit an article to the editor for publication. The deadline for submissions is the first Tuesday of the month the newsletter is due out. Articles may be edited and/or published at the descretion of the editor. Articles may be mailed to Hal Mason, 258 E. High St. #9, Lexington, KY 40508 or submitted via modem to me at 606-255-5989. You will need to call me first in order to arrange a time for me to have my good ol' Atari set up for auto answer. AtariWriter is the preferable format, but any ASCII format will be acceptable.

B.R.A.C.E. meets the third Tuesday of the month at 7:00 P.M. The site of the meeting each month will be in room MN 263 University of Kentucky Medical Center. The public is welcome to attend our meetings, but access to the library and the newsletter are limited to dues paying members of B.R.A.C.E.

MAIL ORDER FOR YOUR COMPUTER
by Phillip Taylor

So, you found that new piece of equipment you always wanted for about 1/3rd the normal price. The only catch is that you have to order it mail order. If you are like me, you have a real problem with mail order purchasing. There is nothing like holding the object in your hand prior to buying it, then going up to the counter and telling the salesperson that you will take it. But the advantages to mail order purchasing can outweigh the disadvantages. Consider the following:

1. Most mail order houses are reputable dealers.

2. In areas where certain specific pieces of equipment or software are hard to find or not sold, mail order is the only way to get those items.

3. Most items are heavily discounted.

4. Mail order buying is convenient.

On the other hand:

1. Some mail order houses are hard to reach in case of a problem with your order.

2. Some items are "back ordered" (or in lay man's terms, NOT IN STOCK, AWAITING NEW SUPPLY. This may mean a long wait for your order.

3. Some mail order houses do not warrant that their products will arrive in one piece or that the product will work when it does arrive.

When deciding whether you want to order something from a mail order house you need to find out the following:

1. What is their policy on returns, do they take merchandise back and if so will I get my money or another piece of merchandise. Will they only exchange if the merchandise is defective or will they exchange the product if it doesn't fit the need.

2. Do they offer a trial period with the merchandise.

3. Is the mail order house a "middle-man" like Computer Mail Order, or the manufacturer like ICD. Generally the manufacturer will be more lenient in their return policy and will also offer the customer more accurate information prior to and after the sale.

4. Is there a different customer service line from their order line? Usually the order line is Toll Free and the service line is a Toll Call.

5. Is there a service charge for using a credit card.

6. In order to get the price advertised for a particular product do you need to order some amount of other (usually useless) stuff.

7. What is the shipping and handling. This is an interesting cost since it really just translates into more profit for the business. Granted the shipping is some net cost but when you compare shipping cost to the price charged for the shipping and handling, the handling gets a large share of the money. Handling is usually labor and materials that in most retail situations comes out of dealer profit, so if mail order houses pass this cost along to the buyer, the effect is a gain to profit.

8. Is the mail order house inside or outside the state where you live. Usually, if the mail order house outside the state then the customer pays no sales tax. If it is inside the state a state sales tax is usually applied.

When you finally are ready to order you have the choice of ordering by phone or in writing. This is one situation where I would recommend ordering by telephone. The main reason for this is the 2 way communication between you and the company. It is much easier to clarify what you want by telephone than by writing. Further you can ask the person on the other end any questions you may have regarding the product prior to ordering.

Once you have the mail order house on the phone you need to decide whether you are to pay for the item by check or by credit card or C.O.D. Since the charge for most C.O.D. orders are outrageous and given that most places do not send items C.O.D. this may not be a viable alternative. I would order the item by credit card. The main reason for this is that Federal Laws exist to protect the consumer in these situations. Generally, if a consumer buys something mail order, and the item does not reach the consumer in a reasonable time, the consumer can with hold payment of that disputed amount from his bill. The consumer needs to send a letter, in writing to the credit card company explaining the occurrences. This remedy is available after the consumer has tried to get the problem straightened out with the mail order house. The credit card company will then investigate the billing problem and will get back to the consumer. The credit card company cannot take any steps to collect the disputed amount until some resolution has been reached. In my case I ordered a piece of software from a mail order house. The documentation arrived but the software did not. I wrote the company explaining what occurred, I called them several times. Each time they said they would send out a replacement but they never did. After 2 months I saw the amount

hit my credit card account. I wrote a letter to the credit card company explaining what occurred. I also wrote the mail order house and sent them a copy of the letter to the credit card company. Within 3 days I received my software and a letter of apology from the head of the mail order house.

The problem with sending a check or money order through the mail is that there is no verification that the check was received until you have paid for the item. The key to getting what you want out of mail order houses is to keep the money in your pocket until you have the item. Credit Cards are the perfect media for this.

If you do get completely ripped off by a mail order deal, you can report the company to the Postmaster for Mail fraud. See your Local Postmaster for details. Also you can always sue the company, but usually this costs more money than it is worth. If the company is bankrupt, and you win a suit, you have won little anyway.

On that note, one last thought, be careful when dealing with mail order companies but don't let your fear keep you from saving money. Pay for the purchase with a credit card, and use the phone until you sense trouble.

PRINTER REVIEWS
By Joe Tackett

Here are reviews of commonly used printers:

BIG BLUE-The Big Blue is an inexpensive graphics printer. (RETAIL PRICE ABOUT $40.00)
It's Epson compatible but, unfortunately it is only thermal. Also, there are other limits, such as its graphics aren't that great. It is smaller than other ATARI compatible printers.

OKIMATE 10-The OKIMATE 10 is a color (or thermal) printer, (RETAIL IS ABOUT $300.00). Its graphics are super, buuuuttttttt it's not Epson compatible.

BROTHER HR-25-The BROTHER HR 25 is a letter (daisy wheel) quality printer. It can print color and is especially good for word processing. It is Epson compatible and retails for about $700.00.

OKIDATA 92-The Okidata 92 is a favorite dot matrix printer. It's slower than most, but is a lot quieter. The graphics aren't that good. It retails for about $400.00.

THE PRESIDENTIAL SUITE
By Dan Claudy

For those of you who didn't know, last month'S meeting was called off due to the weather. Norma heard that the library was closing early and was kind enough to call those of you who regularly attend as well as most of the rest of the club. This month's meeting is in our new permanent (maybe) home.

Robb Stringfield has secured a lecture hall in the UK Med Center. It has plush seats, a chalk board, a screen and an audio visual room. What more could we ask? Well, we could ask for a better parking situation than we had near the Chem-Physics Building. Believe it or not, we've got it. See the map elsewhere in the newsletter.

It is nearing time for a large number of you to renew your memberships. In the coming year, we plan to upgrade the library by acquiring some commercial applications programs such as a spreadsheet, a database and a word processor. We also plan on subscribing to at least one disk edition of an Atari specific magazine. As a member, your input will result in the acquisition of programs you want and will entitle you to borrow them for actual use or for trial purposes before buying.

The program for this meeting will be on interfaces, those mysterious little "black boxes" that let your computer talk with peripherals such as printers and modems. We will also introduce for discussion, a new raffle for the winners choice of an 80 column monochrome monitor, an Avatex 1200 baud modem or a P:R:CONNECTION. We will be prepared to kick it off at this meeting if it meets with the membership's approval. So...

BE THERE!

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PAT DANRIDGE: EDITORIAL ASST.

ALL OF THE ABOVE CAN BE REACHED:
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LEXINGTON KY. 40583-3063

PRINT SHOP VS. TYPESETTER
SOFTWARE COMPARISON
by Hal Mason

The purpose of this article is to compare the two pieces of software mentioned in the title, PRINT SHOP by BRODERBUND and TYPESETTER by XLENT. Both are Graphics programs for all 8-bit Atari's with at least 48K and a disk drive; but, TYPESETTER does have the capability of utilizing the full 128K of the 130XE, while PRINT SHOP does not. The opinions expressed in this article are mine and were formed by having hands-on experience with both pieces of software.

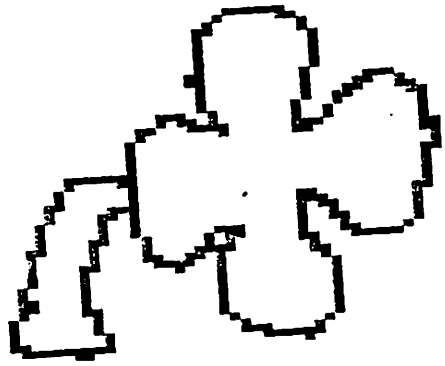
One of the first differences one notices between the two programs before either has been booted up is in the documentation. I do believe that it is helpful to read the documentation before trying to work with a piece of software. Hence, I did read the doc's of both programs before I actually worked with either program. I found the documentation for PRINT SHOP to be well written and organized, while the documentation for TYPESETTER is poorly written and organized. It should be noted that part of the reason for this is due to another major difference between the two programs, which I will discuss in detail later in this comparison. This difference is that PRINT SHOP is a Menu driven program while TYPESETTER is a command driven program. The doc's for PRINT SHOP go through each menu and explain how to work your way through it to get the results you desire to get. Everything is clear and easy to follow. On the other hand, the doc's for TYPESETTER go through the commands in a way that is very cumbersome and confusing. While each command is listed and described, this is done in a manner which is very confusing and the descriptions often do not adequately explain exactly what the command is intended to do. The documentation for this program needs to have a clearer explanation for the commands along with pictures illustrating the command! So, I give PRINT SHOP the clear cut advantage on this count.

As mentioned above, another major difference between the two is their structure. PRINT SHOP is entirely menu driven and TYPESETTER is basically command driven. One might think that a command driven program would be the better program. In some cases one would be right. But, not in this case. OK, PRINT SHOP can be a pain to work with at times because the menu allows for no way to get around a choice which one may not want to use for a particular project. An example of this would be the printing out of a letterhead. In order to do this with PRINT SHOP, one needs to go through all of the choices for a graphics, then for a font, then four text windows, and a line separating the letterhead from the body of the form. Then one has to go through the same selections for a bottom. This can be a major time consumer and if I had designed the program, there would be a way to work around going through all of the menus and to jump to the next menu which you wish to use. But, unfortunately, TYPESETTER proves to be even harder to get around in, even though it has a theoretical advantage. While PRINT SHOP is too dependent on menu's, TYPESETTER is too dependent on commands. And since their are so many commands to master and the doc's are so poorly written, I found TYPESETTER to be a very hard program to work with. This is a shame since, TYPESETTER does have a clear advantage in another category discussed below. But, again I have to give the advantage in design and workability to PRINT SHOP. While PRINT SHOP'S design is slow at times, it is at least a USER FRIENDLY PROGRAM. I have invented a new category to place TYPESETTER into: USER HOSTILE!

It is a shame that this is the case, since TYPESETTER is the clear cut winner when it comes to graphics. The resolution of icons created with TYPESETTER is clearly superior to those created by PRINT SHOP. Unfortunately, it is much easier to create icons with PRINT SHOP. You will find two icons which I created with PRINT SHOP in this edition of BRACEBITS. One is the Atari FUJI symbol, which I created with a joystick and the other is a shamrock, since March is month we celebrate St. Patrick's Day. I used a KOALA PAD to create the shamrock and whole process took less than 5 minutes.

The final difference which we will cover is in printer compatibility. PRINT SHOP is compatible with most printers except Atari printers, even Atari dot matrix printers which have graphics capabilities. Unless, TYPESETTER has been revised from the version which I used, TYPESETTER is compatible with only Epson and Gemini\Star printers. So, give the edge to PRINT SHOP here, too.

In conclusion, I would like to encourage XLENT to rewrite the program to be a combination menu\command driven program with compatibility with most graphics printers. I would encourage BRODERBUND to do likewise with PRINT SHOP and to update the program for full use of the 130XE's 128K and better resolution of its graphics. If this were the case it would be a tie. But, since this is not the case, I'll have to give my recommendation to BRODERBUND'S PRINT SHOP.



INSTANT DOS!
by Dan Claudy

Do you ever feel like it takes forever to boot DOS? Do you find yourself twiddling your thumbs after turning the computer on to do some file copying waiting for DOS to load? Do you find yourself wondering if waiting for DOS to boot so you can do a binary load is worth it? Well you can kiss those blues goodbye. Now there is DOS on ROM.

"So what?" you may be thinking. "What does that mean to me?" you say. DOS on ROM simply means you turn your computer on, and faster than it takes some cartridge games to load, that ole familiar DOS menu is staring you in the kisser. Now isn't that slick?!

You can install DOS on ROM two different ways. You can plug in a cartridge or you can perform a somewhat intricate hardware mod on your computer. I've used the cartridge and it works like a charm.

The cartridge is housed in an old game cart so you plug it in just like a game cart (while the computer is off). Turn on the computer and poof, the DOS menu is awaiting your every command. If you go the other route and opt for an internal installation, you should be sure of your skill with a soldering iron and a desoldering tool.

You can order DOS on ROM from Michael E. Wheeler, P.O. Box 104013, Anchorage, AK 99510. He offers DOS 2.0S, 2.5 and a modified 2.0S called 2.0D&S (it works in double as well as single density). The cost for the cart is $20 and the EPROMs for onboard DOS are $18. There is a $2.00 S&H charge as well.

Now there is no reason to wait impatiently for DOS to boot. Mr. Wheeler has shown himself to be an honest businessman in my dealings with him and I heartily recommend him to you if you are interested in instant DOS. For those of you who want further information, see me at the meeting.

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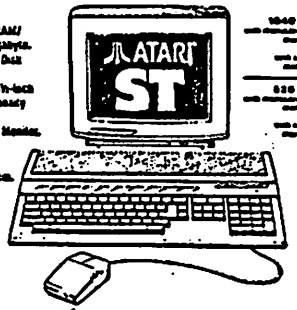

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THE FILING CABINET
by Phillip Taylor, V.P.

This article is going to become a semi-regular feature of Bracebits. What it will do is tell you what is going on with the BRACE library. I'm sure you have noticed that the library has undergone a face lift since we started it last year. I have take the programs, docs, books and magazines and placed them in folders so it is easier for someone to see what it is they are checking out. It also cuts down on items being lost from the folder since the magazines and doc's are attached to the folders. I hope this method will help you get the most out of our library.

As far as new arrivals in the library, we have received several donations from the membership:

1. One On One, a basketball game from Electronic Arts, complete with doc's

2. GOS and DOS 4, A graphic environment dos and the dos that was destined for the never really released 1450 XLD.

3. Strategic Simulations, a compilation of text and graphic games involving stratagy.

4. Super Cheater, a program that will allow you to create super characters with the game ULTIMA 4. This is a demo disk that was sent to us by the manufacturer.

5. A Demo from a magazine on disk company for the ST.

6. Homeword, a word processing program from Sierra-On-Line. Complete with all DOC's.

In the future I will try to get more applications programs for the library. We have discussed with Norma and Bob Williams the possiblity of getting copies of their Public Domain application programs. Hopefully by the April Meeting we will have some of these programs in the library as well, so renew your membership if it is coming up for reneval and get your crack at these programs.

What I really need is input from the membership as to what they would like to see. We do have planned to add some commercial programs to the library as well and we need guidance as to what you want to see. Stop by the library area at the next meeting and talk to me. When we make our next buying trip I will consider your request and try to get it for you.

THANKS

NEWS BITS

This is going to be another fairly regular feature of BRACEBITS. The purpose of this article is to keep you up to date in the goings on in the Atari Community.

LINK DOWN PERMANENTLY: The first bit of news is not very good. The Missing Link, the local first class Atari Bulletin Board is down for good. According to the Sysops, Bob and Norma Williams, since they are investing in a new home, they felt that the Link cost too much money to keep it going. Bob is now selling a lot of the equipment,(see classified elsewhere in the paper) so if you want a good buy on some first class equipment give him a call. He also mentioned that a possiblity existed however, once the dust of the move is settled and when they get established in their new home, that the Link may rise again. For now, though, no more Link.

BRACE WITHOUT A BBS: The second bit of news follows the first. Since the Link is down, BRACE has no BBS to call home. BRACEBITS has been assured that this problem will be discussed both at the next meeting and during the next officers meeting. It is hoped that some provision can be made to accomodate the BRACE board on either another system or perhaps the possiblity exists that the BRACE board might exist on its own.

BRACE GETS A HOME: Through the efforts of Brace Member Robb Stringfield, Brace now has a home in the UK medical Center. As usual the meetings will be held every 3rd Tuesday of the month at 7:00 pm

ATARI PRODUCES IBM COMPAT: Atari is coming out with an IBM compat. Jumping on the bandwagon with other computer companies it is hoped that this will gain Atari recognition as a viable computer company. According to reports, the new IBM compat has the Color graphics and Monochrome graphics cards, 512k ram as well as both serial and parallel ports. Sources say that Atari will sell these computers for around $700.

ATARI SELLS STOCK ON AMEX: In an attempt to gets some new capital, Atari is selling stock on the American stock exhange. Presently the stocks go for around 26.00 per share. BRACE has a copy of the prospectus available for viewing.

BRACEBITS

ST User

January 1987

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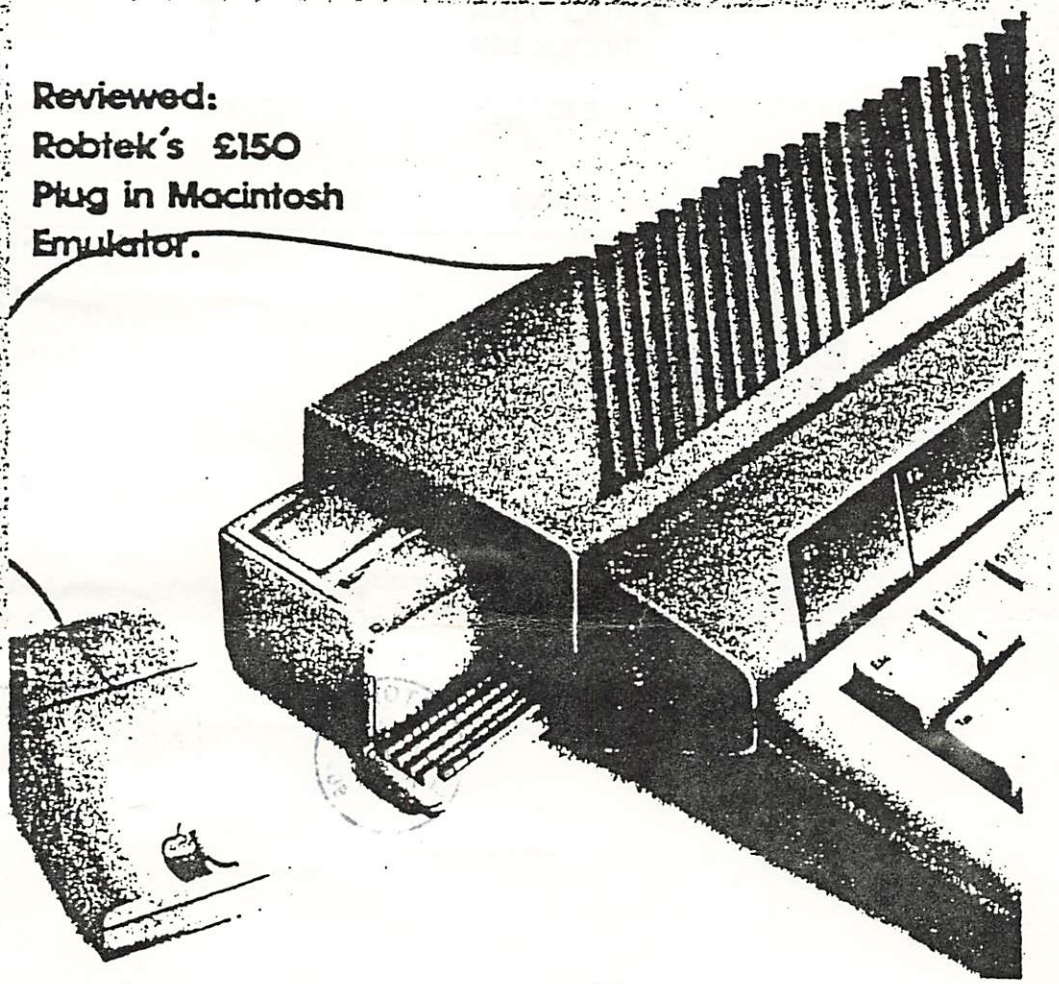

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ATTENTION: B.R.A.C.E. HAS A NEW MEETING PLACE IN THE UK MED CENTER ROOM MN263 TUES. MAR. 17, 1987